Opening Day in the House

The clerk of the House in the preceding term presides at the beginning of the first day’s session and call s the chamber to order, checking the roll of the representatives-elect.

Members then choose a Speaker

–By custom, the Speaker is a long-standing member of the majority party and election on the floor is only formality

Speaker then takes the oath of office, then Speaker swears in the rest of the members

Then, the House adopts the rules that will govern its proceedings through the term

Finally, Members of the 20 permanent committees of the House are appointed by a floor vote

The House is organized

Opening day in the Senate

Since the Senate is a continuous body its first day session is generally short and routine.

Newly elected and reelected member must be sworn in, vacancies in Senate organization, and committees must be filled in , and a few other details

State of the Union

When Senate is notified that House is organized, a joint committee is appointed and instructed to “*wait upon the President of the United States and inform him that a quorum of each House is assembled and that Congress is ready to receive any communication he may be pleased to make.”*

Within a few weeks, late January or early February, the President delivers the annual State of the Union message to a joint session of Congress.

The address is based off of the Constitutional command in Article 2 Section 3:

He shall from time to time give to the Congress information on the State of the Union, and recommend to their consideration such measures as he shall judge necessary and expedient…”

**The purpose of the State of the Union address** is to address Congress, the citizens, and the world and:

1. Lay out the broad shape of the policies the administration expects to follow and the course s/he has charted for the nation
2. Usually include a number of specific legislative recommendations, along with a plea that Congress will enact them

Its presentation is soon followed by many bills drawn up in the executive branch and introduced in the House and Senate by various members in the President’s party.

1. **Video Clip of the State of the Union Address**

In the Video Clip of the State of the Union Address:

What does President Obama call on Congress to Pass? **Legislation for Equal Pay For Women**

What does President Obama say will be over by ‘this time next year’? **The War in Afghanastan**

1. **Continue Lecture**

The Presiding Officers

**Speaker of the House–**by far the more important and more powerful within the halls of Congress

First woman to serve as Speaker–Nancy Pelosi

Nearly all the Speaker’s powers revolve around two duties: **to preside** and **to keep order**

Speaker does not vote often, House rules only say that the Speaker *MUST* vote to break a tie

**President of the Senate**­–the Vice President, cannot take the floor to speak or debate and may vote *ONLY* to break a tie

Party Officers

**Party Caucus**–closed meeting of the members of each party in each house, deals mostly with matters related to party organization such as: selection of party floor leaders and questions of committee membership

The Floor Leaders

**Floor Leaders­**–legislative strategists, try to carry out the decisions of their parties caucuses and steer floor action to their parties benefit–They do not hold official positions in either chamber

**Majority leader**–floor leader of the majority party

**Minority leader**–floor leader of the minority party

Both are assisted by **whips**–assistant floor leaders who serve as a liason between the party’s leadership and its rank-and-file members

Committee Chairman

**Committee Chairmen**–those members who head the standing committees in each chamber

When a committee’s bill has been **reported to the floor**–approved for consideration, the chairman usually manages the debate and tries to steer it to final passage

**Seniority Rule**–an unwritten custom, the most important posts in Congress will be held by those party members with the longest records of service

Criticisms: 1)seniority system ignores ability,

2)rewards mere length of service,

3)discourages younger members,

4)chairman of a committee is often out of touch with current public opinion

Defenses: 1)seniority system ensures powerful and experienced members will head

each committee,

2)encourages members to stay on a particular committee and over time gain a wide-ranging knowledge of matters that fall within that committee’s jurisdiction